



History of the Games

Now in its 21st year, the National Veterans Golden Age Games offer sports and recreational competitive events for veterans 55 years of age and older. The Games continue to serve as a showcase for the rehabilitation value that wellness and fitness provide in the lives of older Americans.

The National Veterans Golden Age Games are an outgrowth of the Department of Veterans Affairs' historic involvement in geriatric programs. Many of the events began as recreational activities at VA hospitals and nursing home care units across the country. Inspired by the health and fitness movement for America's senior citizens, the Games extend that concept to our nation's aging veterans. In 1985, the first Games took place in Albany, Georgia, with 115 competitors representing VA medical facilities across the United States.

A "fountain of youth" for the rapidly aging veteran population, the Games provide a multi-event sports and therapeutic recreation program for eligible veterans receiving care at any VA medical facility. It is the premier senior adaptive rehabilitation program in the United States, and the only national seniors' program designed to improve the quality of life for all older veterans, including those with a wide range of abilities and disabilities. This event truly reflects VA's mission – to provide quality programs and health care for America's aging veteran population. It has become one of the most progressive and adaptive rehabilitative senior sports programs in the United States and the world.

Over the years, competitive events at the National Veterans Golden Age Games have been adapted to meet specific needs of the participants. The Games have separate age groups and gender divisions. Additionally, because many veterans also face medical challenges, events were added for those who use wheelchairs and those who have visual impairments. To accommodate the varying degrees of physical conditioning, motor and cognitive skills of the participants, basic competition rules were adapted. The modification of rules and use of adaptive equipment in many events allow non-ambulatory and visually impaired veterans to participate, in separate divisions where needed and with ambulatory and sighted veterans when possible. This has made the National Veterans Golden Age Games a truly adaptive therapeutic sports competition that has become a model for other local, state and national senior sports events.

In 2004, the National Veterans Golden Age Games became a qualifier for the National Senior Games, a member of the U.S. Olympic Committee. Gold, silver and bronze medalists in certain events now have the opportunity to compete further, among America's elite senior athletes. In 2006, 327 competitors qualified for the 2007 National Senior Games in Lexington, Kentucky.

This outstanding program has grown from 115 participants its first year to 596 in 2006, with more than 600 expected to compete in the 2007 Games. For the past several years, the aging Vietnam veteran population has entered the Games in greater numbers each year, making up the largest group of competitors by period of service. By age group, the over-70 categories are now the largest.

Since the Games began, veterans have competed in cities across the United States. A full listing of event locations and hosting VA medical facilities follows.

National Veterans Golden Age Games: 1985-2006

Year	Location	Host VA Medical Facilities
1985	Albany, Georgia	Atlanta and Dublin VA Medical Centers
1987	Ft. Lyon, Colorado	Ft. Lyon VA Medical Center
1988	Marion, Indiana	Marion VA Medical Center
1990	Sherman, Texas	Sam Rayburn Memorial Veterans Center, Bonham
1991	St. Petersburg, Florida	Bay Pines VA Medical Center
1992	Ypsilanti, Michigan	Ann Arbor VA Medical Center
1993	Johnson City, Tennessee	Mountain Home VA Medical Center
1994	Lisle, Illinois	Edward Hines, Jr. Veterans Hospital
1995	Dallas, Texas	Dallas VA Medical Center
1996	Riverside, California	Jerry L. Pettis VA Medical Center, Loma Linda
1997	Leavenworth, Kansas	Dwight D. Eisenhower VA Medical Center
1998	Leesburg, Virginia	VA Capitol Network
1999	Geneva, New York	Canandaigua VA Medical Center
2000	Topeka, Kansas	VA Heartland Network
2001	Duncanville, Texas	VA North Texas Health Care System
2002	Los Angeles, California	VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System
2003	Orono, Maine	Togus VA Medical Center and Regional Office
2004	Fresno, California	VA Central California Health Care System
2005	Norman, Oklahoma	Oklahoma City VA Medical Center
2006	Hampton, Virginia	Hampton VA Medical Center
2007	Houston, Texas	Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center

Since 1990, one participant has been chosen each year for being the “Most Inspirational” person to compete. That veteran exhibits the qualities of fitness, sportsmanship and competitive skill. In 1995, the name of this award was changed to the “George Gangi Inspiration Award,” in honor of the late George Gangi, a participant at the Games in Dallas that year. Winners of the award, to date, are as follows:

1990 – Ivan Kornutik	1999 – Houston Brumit
1991 – Theodore “Ted” Trent	2000 – Beverly Smith
1992 – Gus Schaefer	2001 – Clifford Junkins
1993 – Landon “Chili” Chilcutt	2002 – Adrien Mohammed
1994 – William “Howard” Kennett	2003 – Kenneth A. Peterson
1995 – William “Sad Sam” Franks	2004 – Roy Gantt
1996 – Alice Barszcz	2005 – Chester Golembiewski
1997 – Ed Viola	2006 – Charles Wynder
1998 – Donald Mullett	

“*Life begins at 55*”— at least it does for the veterans competing in the National Veterans Golden Age Games. This event clearly demonstrates that sports and fitness are important for *all* Americans, at any age. It is a national show-case for the preventive and therapeutic value of sports, fitness, and recreation — all vital ingredients in VA’s extensive rehabilitation programs. Since the beginning, the event has encouraged older veterans to remain active, both physically and mentally. Each year, those who participate return home to encourage others to do the same.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the Veterans Canteen Service (VCS) and Help Hospitalized Veterans (HHV) co-sponsor the National Veterans Golden Age Games. This partnership fosters an exceptional, quality event that promises serious competition and lasting memories for our nation’s older veterans.